

## **VCGCB Improves Policies for Mental Health Care Providers**

In an effort to ensure that mental health services are readily available and accessible to victims of violent crime, the California Victim Compensation and Government Claims Board (VCGCB) approved significant changes to the service limitations and reporting requirements for reimbursement of mental health counseling services at its meeting on January 19, 2006. Subsequently, at the February 16, 2006 meeting, the VCGCB took action to raise the reimbursement rates for mental health care providers.

Regarding the session limitations, early in 2003, the VCGCB adopted mental health regulations that set session limitations for outpatient mental health counseling, established specific criteria for treatment beyond those limitations, and required specific documentation at various stages of treatment. At that time, the VCGCB indicated that the impact of the revised regulations would be reviewed periodically and changes would be proposed as circumstances and experience dictated.

At its meeting in January, the VCGCB reviewed the mental health session limits and reporting requirements and made several significant changes based on feedback from mental health care providers. Providers are no longer required to submit a Treatment Progress Report after 15 sessions in order for the remainder of the initial sessions to be authorized. Once a provider has submitted a Treatment Plan after five sessions, and that plan is approved, no further reports are required unless the provider needs to request additional treatment beyond the initial session limits.

Regarding the reimbursement rate for mental health services, the rate for licensed psychologists has been increased from \$90 to a maximum of \$110 per session. The rate for marriage and family therapists and licensed clinical social workers has been increased to a maximum of \$90 per session, up from \$70. The group therapy rate continues to be reimbursed at 40 percent of the individual therapy rate.

“The session limitations, documentation requirements, and criteria for additional treatment have been effective in decreasing the costs of mental health reimbursement and creating a better system of monitoring treatment,” said Executive Officer Karen McGagin. “However, some aspects of the session limitations and related reporting requirements tended to complicate the processing of claims, both for providers and for the VCGCB.

“The changes the VCGCB made will enhance access to mental health services for crime victims and substantially reduce the time that providers must spend completing paperwork. We have kept our promise to review the impact of session limitations and reimbursement rates to ensure that both are consistent with current professional standards,” said McGagin.

An informational copy of the new service limitations and session limits was filed with the Secretary of State pursuant to Government Code section 13957.2(a) and became effective for claims filed on or after January 24, 2006. New provider reimbursement rates are effective for mental health services provided on or after March 1, 2006. The VCGCB will continue to regularly review the effect of the new guidelines and reimbursement rates.

For more information, call the VCGCB's Customer Service Unit at 1-800-777-9229 or visit the VCGCB Web site at: [www.victimcompensation.ca.gov](http://www.victimcompensation.ca.gov). The VCGCB hopes these improvements will encourage all mental health professionals to reach out in offering their services to victims of violent crime.